

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin by the human itch mite. The microscopic scabies mite burrows into the upper layer of the skin where it lives and lays its eggs.

Who is at risk for scabies?

Scabies is found worldwide. Scabies can spread rapidly under crowded conditions where close body and skin contact is frequent. Child care facilities are a common site of scabies infestations. Other common sites of scabies outbreaks are nursing homes, extended-care facilities, and prisons.

How soon after infestation with scabies do symptoms begin?

If a person has never had scabies before, symptoms may take as long as four to six weeks to begin. It is important to remember that an infested person can spread scabies during this time, even without symptoms. If a person has had scabies before, symptoms usually appear much sooner after exposure (one to four days).

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most common signs and symptoms of scabies are intense itching, especially at night, and a pimple-like itchy rash. The itching and rash may affect much of the body or be limited to a particular area of the body. The rash can also include tiny blisters and scales. Scratching the rash can cause skin sores, which may become infected by bacteria. Tiny burrows are sometimes seen on the skin, caused by the female scabies mite tunneling just beneath the surface of the skin. These burrows appear as tiny, raised and crooked grayish-white or skin-colored lines on the skin surface.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is usually spread by direct, prolonged, skin-to-skin contact with a person who has scabies. Scabies can spread easily to household members. A quick handshake or hug will usually not spread scabies. Scabies sometimes is spread indirectly by sharing articles such as clothing, towels, or bedding used by an infested person. Scabies mites do not survive more than two to three days away from human skin. Animals do not spread human scabies.

How is scabies infestation diagnosed?

Diagnosis of scabies infestation is usually made based on the customary appearance and distribution of the rash and the presence of burrows. If possible, the diagnosis should be confirmed by identifying the mite or mite eggs. Typically fewer than 10-15 mites can be present on the entire body of an infested person who is otherwise healthy.

What is the treatment for scabies?

Medications to kill scabies mites are available with a doctor's prescription. Carefully follow the instructions provided for application of the medication. Treatment may also be recommended for household members. All persons should be treated at the same time in order to prevent reinfestation. Retreatment may be necessary if itching continues for more than two to four weeks after treatment or if new burrows or rash continue to appear. Seek the advice of your doctor.

How can scabies be prevented?

Scabies is prevented by avoiding direct skin-to-skin contact with an infested person or with items such as clothing or bedding used by an infested person. Bedding and clothing worn or used next to the skin anytime during the three days before treatment should be machine washed and dried using hot water and hot dryer cycle or be dry-cleaned. Items that cannot be dry-cleaned or laundered can be stored in a closed plastic bag for several days to a week. Scabies mites generally do not survive more than two to three days away from human skin.

Children and adults can usually return to child care, school, or work the day after treatment.

How do I get more information on scabies?

Calhoun County Public Health Department
Phone: (269) 969-6383

Center for Disease Control
Phone: 800-CDC-INFO
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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